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THE NEED OF A CONSTRUCTIVE SOCIAL PROGRAM FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL

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How to handle student organizations in high schools is a perplexing problem for most school administrators. Educators have felt, on the one hand, that the social instincts of the pupils naturally lead them to form into groups and that they can derive much valuable experience from managing the school societies which they institute. On the other hand, such organizations frequently become undemocratic. Too few pupils participate in them; they are often too expensive; and they are often too difficult to control. The real test, however, of the value of student organizations to the school should be the same as the test applied to any other departments of school activity; namely, how far do such organizations promote the chief ends of education, i.e., education of the type necessary in a democracy like the United States? In order to apply this test, it may be well, at the risk of seeming trite, to examine our present-day conception of the goal of secondary education, and then to consider whether, in any way, high-school societies help the pupil to reach this goal. Secondary education in America has long aimed at the developing, so far as possible, of each pupil into a well-rounded individual, fitted for citizenship in a democracy. To be so fitted he should have the physical equipment and the technical

training that will enable him to be self-supporting. He must have such training as will enable him eventually to maintain a home where he may successfully rear those who are later to take his place in the community. He must be able intelligently to assume his share of responsibility in the government under which he lives, and he should spend his leisure hours in a way that will help to round out his personality and to give him some appreciation of the finer things of life.

Any social activities of the pupils which will help to further these main objectives of education will readily be accepted as legitimate functions of the school. Conversely, it ought to be obvious that student activities that do not fit into this scheme of education have no place in the school system. The following study of organizations in representative high schools of the country has been made in order to determine whether or not the student organizations of the modern high school do, in any way, help to fulfil the aims of secondary education.

The experience of the teachers of the Lincoln High School, Lincoln, Nebraska, in trying to deal with the problem of school organizations probably has been fairly typical of the experience of teachers in other schools. There exist in the Lincoln High School four literary societies for girls and two debating and one scientific society for boys. There were also prior to this year seven Greek-letter fraternities, and a number of clubs, entirely local but more or less secret. The societies recognized by the school have become, largely, exclusive social clubs, if one is to judge from their reports of meetings held during the past year. Until last year all were accustomed to give social functions at the local hotels. This custom of holding entertainments in public places had become established, for the most part, because the school for years was housed in very cramped quarters where there was no suitable place for parties to be held. Because the social meetings of these organizations were held in public places, teachers found the task of chaperonage very difficult and tried to turn the responsibility over to the parents, the teachers being responsible for no entertainments given outside the high-school building. The attempt was not very successful; for there was no check on the expense connected with student

parties held in hotels or public halls; there were no regulations as to the time when the parties should close, nor as to who might attend; and frequently there was no satisfactory chaperonage. The girls' societies were in the habit of giving "rushing" parties, and aped college sororities in many ways. Both the boys' and the girls' societies seemed to be rapidly changing into purely social organizations of little value to the school or to the members of the societies. Because of the dissatisfaction of parents, pupils, and teachers with these conditions, a "student affairs committee" composed of Miss Sarah T. Muir, Miss Margaret Davis, Miss Annetta Sprung, Mr. A. T. Cavanaugh, Miss Olivia Pound, and Mr. Jesse H. Newlon, principal, was appointed in the fall of 1916. This committee was to have charge of all social activities of the pupils. They investigated the situation and passed the following tentative rules:

RULES FOR THE STUDENT SOCIETIES OF THE LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

1. Each society will be permitted two formal functions each year.
2. All parties must close by 11:30 P.M. General school parties must close by 10:30 P.M.
3. The cost of a party must not exceed \$1.00 per member participating.
4. Each society meeting bi-weekly must have at least five serious programs each semester. Each society meeting weekly must have twelve programs each semester.
5. All formal parties must be chaperoned by at least two teachers and two parents. The sponsor of a society or class must approve of the chaperons for a party at least five days prior to the party.
6. The books of all treasurers of societies, or classes, or other student organizations must show all expenses of the organizations whatsoever. All treasurers' books must be audited semiannually by an auditor appointed by the principal.
7. The secretary of each society or class must report in writing at the end of each semester to the principal, or to some student committee which may be constituted for that purpose, upon the activities of the societies during the semester. This secretary's report must show the programs as actually given in the meetings.
8. The society and not the sponsors of a society will be held responsible for the enforcement of these rules. The sponsors will not be expected to do the work of the society. It will be their function to advise and help the society to the best of their ability whenever the societies ask for such assistance. Except in cases of emergency the sponsors will not be expected to exercise any repressive powers.

A study was made later to determine how well the school societies lived up to these rules, the percentage of members participating in the programs, the scholastic standing of the members, and their attendance record. A similar study was made also of the scholastic standing and attendance of 129 fraternity and of as many non-fraternity boys. It was hoped in this way to determine, if possible, the value of school organizations for high-school pupils. The following is a summary of this investigation:

REPORT ON THE STUDENT SOCIETIES OF THE LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE
SECOND SEMESTER 1916-17

SUMMARY FOR GIRLS' SOCIETIES

Total membership, 115

Average membership in four societies, 28

Average number of members participating in the programs, 7

Number of teachers acting as sponsors for these societies, 8

Average annual expense per member (for three societies), \$2.61

Absences, 909

Cases of tardiness 224

Scholastic standing: The 115 members of girls' societies made a grade of 90 per cent or above in 250 studies and failed in 28 studies.

SUMMARY FOR 115 GIRLS NOT MEMBERS OF GIRLS' SOCIETIES

Absences, 933½

Cases of tardiness, 178

Scholastic standing: The 115 girls not members of girls' societies made a grade of 90 per cent or above in 332 studies and failed in 36 studies.

SUMMARY FOR BOYS' SOCIETIES

Total membership in three societies, 76

Average membership in three societies, 25

Total number of programs (two societies), 8

Percentage of membership participating in the programs (not given)

Number of teachers acting as sponsors for these societies, 3

Average annual expense per member, \$4.59

Absences, 659

Case of tardiness, 386

Scholastic standing: The 76 members of boys' societies made a grade of 90 per cent or above in 82 studies and failed in 43 studies.

SUMMARY FOR 129 MEMBERS OF FRATERNITIES

Absences, 1,386

Cases of tardiness, 802

Scholastic standing: The 129 members of fraternities made a grade of 90 per cent or above in 96 studies and failed in 102 studies.

SUMMARY FOR 129 BOYS NOT MEMBERS OF SOCIETIES NOR FRATERNITIES

Absences, 1,085

Cases of tardiness, 412

Scholastic standing: The 129 boys members neither of fraternities nor societies made a grade of 90 per cent or above in 152 studies and failed in 48 studies.

At the same time that the student affairs committee was investigating the student societies in the Lincoln High School a study was made also of similar organizations in other high schools of the country to see whether we were dealing fairly with our pupils in making the rules given above, to learn how similar situations in other schools are handled, and to secure help in solving our present difficulties; but mainly we wished to determine, if possible, the place of such organizations in the modern scheme of secondary education. In order to learn of conditions in other schools the following questionnaire was sent to one hundred representative high schools of the country:

Name of school.

Answered by.

Official position.

1. List of societies. (State purpose where name does not indicate it.)
 - A. Literary.
 - B. Departmental.
 - C. Others.
2. Are your societies accomplishing their purposes? If not, why not?
3. Do you have any purely social societies?
4. Do you have any societies that do not have a social as well as serious purpose?
5. Do you have fraternities and sororities?

If so, what is the attitude of your school toward them?

Do you ignore them or do you propose to drive them out by legal processes?

Have you ever had fraternities?

If so, how did you get rid of them?
6. What jurisdiction and supervision of recognized societies is assumed by the faculty?

How are society and class sponsors, or advisers, chosen?

How long do they serve?
7. How are students admitted to your societies?
8. What rules and regulations governing society, class, and other social functions?
 - A. Must they be held in the building?
 - B. Are such functions permitted to be held in hotels, etc.?
 - C. Is dancing permitted?

- D. What chaperonage?
- E. How much does it cost annually (approximately) for a student to belong to your most expensive society?
- F. What regulations regarding the cost of social functions?
- 9. How do you start a society?
- 10. How do you discontinue a society that has ceased to serve its purpose?
- 11. Are your students satisfied with your student societies?
- 12. What is their attitude toward faculty regulations?
- 13. What is the average membership of your societies?
- 14. What percentage of your student body belongs to your societies?
- 15. What provisions do you make for non-members?
- 16. What activities are carried on by class organizations (Senior, Junior, etc.)?
- 17. To what extent do these organizations dominate the social life of the school?
- 18. Is there a conscious attempt to provide activities for the entire membership of these class organizations?
- 19. Remarks.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

- 1. What organization, if any, do you have for student participation in the government of the school?
Describe briefly your organization.
- 2. If you have such an organization, what is the scope of its activities?
- 3. Give a list of definite undertakings on the part of this organization.
- 4. Name the offices of this organization.
The committees.
- 5. How do you supervise student finances?
- 6. To what extent, in your opinion, should the students participate in the government of the school?
- 7. What social activities are carried on by this organization?
- 8. Remarks.

The following report is based on the material in the answers received from the seventy-five schools replying:

The literary society is the oldest and most common type of high-school organization. There are 333 such societies reported by the schools in question, or an average of 4.4 to each school. The work in these societies varies from year to year. Few of them seem to concentrate their efforts on any line of work. Many schools reported that the conventional literary societies are the weakest societies of the school. Several comments of this kind appear in the answers to our questionnaire: "The literary societies are really fraternities which avoid being called fraternities by giving

literary programs." "The literary societies are social rather than literary and are too exclusive." "The literary societies are not accomplishing their purpose." "We have literary societies after a fashion. Not very lively at this time."

In contrast with the general literary societies are the departmental clubs which are interested in one particular line of work. There are 192 such organizations reported, or 2.4 per school. These organizations are, as a rule, sponsored by teachers especially interested in the work of the club, so that the sponsor and the club members are usually more in sympathy with one another than is the case in other organizations. Almost uniformly it was reported that the departmental clubs were accomplishing their purpose.

In the schools in question there are 135 other organizations, or an average of 1.8 per school, making an average of 8.6 student societies in each school. Of the miscellaneous organizations the most common types are the debating clubs and athletic associations. In addition to these there are various other organizations interested in all sorts of projects. There are purely social clubs, dramatic, travel, nature, outing, dancing, musical, and art clubs, clubs interested in everything from postage stamps or chess to social service. Some of these organizations have very unique and interesting names. The "Wranglers" is a debating society, as is also the "Tomahawk" and "Phlogiston." The "Globe Trotters" are obviously members of a travel club. "Papyrus" is an English club. A dramatic club is called the "Royal Mask." The "Nautilus" and the "Mimerian Society" are scholarship organizations. The name of the latter, a club in Manual Arts High School, Los Angeles, California, comes from the fable of Odin, who sacrificed an eye for the privilege of tasting the water of wisdom from Mimer's well. The "Rhythmic Circle" is a girls' dancing club. Some of the societies, too, are interested in unusual projects. The "Cosmopolitan Club" of Hollywood High School, Los Angeles, California, aims to broaden the student's point of view beyond the community to the world at large. There is a "Taste and Tact Club" at the Washington Irving High School, New York City. The "Merrill Club" of West Division High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is composed of all the girls of the school. Among other activities it

aims to bring about proper dress for girls. It puts on a style show each year, and through its leaders and committees corrects girls who are ill-mannered.

Practically all the student organizations recognized by the schools are sponsored by one or more teachers appointed by the principal or chosen by the organization with the approval of the principal. In a few schools the sponsor is chosen by the organization alone. In the latter case the comment was made that "there was a strong tendency to choose weak teachers." In one school only were recognized organizations not sponsored by teachers. The term of service of the sponsor is usually for one year or for an indefinite period. In a few schools it is for one semester. The schools almost uniformly report that the pupils are satisfied to have the teachers serve as advisers. They usually co-operate with the teachers in the most friendly way.

In almost all schools there are regulations governing society and class parties. Fifty-eight schools reported that parties must be held in the school building. In eighteen there was no such requirement. Fifty-three schools reported that such functions were not permitted to be held in hotels or public halls. In ten schools they might be held in such places. In forty-nine schools there might be dancing in the high-school building, while in seventeen others this was not allowed. In forty-six schools the teachers alone acted as chaperons, in twenty-four schools both teachers and parents chaperoned, and in one school the parents only.

Another matter of interest connected with school societies is the question of expense. The average cost annually for a student to belong to the most expensive societies in the schools in question is \$1.58. Four schools reported no expense. Twenty schools reported the expense as under \$1.00. Twenty-two schools gave the expense as \$3.00 or less. In only three schools was the expense over \$3.00. In one of these it was \$4.00, in another \$5.00, and in a third \$10.00. Most schools reported some regulations regarding the cost of social functions. Usually the sponsors of the societies have sole charge of such matters. Colorado Springs High School reports: "Cost is rigidly supervised and curtailed." The report from Manual Arts High School, Los Angeles, California. says:

"We insist on simplicity." The Montclair, New Jersey, High School statement says: "Social functions must be absolutely simple." West Division High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: "Fifty cents is the maximum for tickets to social affairs." West High School, Minneapolis, Minnesota: "Social affairs must be informal, admission fees not over fifty cents per person." In the DeWitt Clinton High School, New York City, the admission fee to social affairs is fifty cents also.

New members are admitted to high-school societies in several ways. In thirteen schools they are admitted because of scholarship standing or by try-outs. In six schools they are elected on application or on the recommendation of the teachers, and in twenty-five schools new members are chosen by the societies as they may see fit. This shows a decidedly democratic tendency, since in thirty-eight schools membership in student societies is open to all or depends on merit.

The method by which new members are elected to societies leads to another important matter, namely, the average membership in student societies. In the schools in question the percentage of the student body belonging to societies is 47. This seems a rather small proportion of the students when one realizes that there are, on an average, about nine such organizations to each school. Thirteen schools reported that the majority of the pupils belonged to the societies. Eight schools gave the average membership as varying from eight to twenty. Fourteen schools gave the average membership as from twenty-five to fifty, and eight schools reported a membership of sixty to seventy-five. In several schools the authorities seemed to feel that too few pupils belonged to societies. The amount of time the sponsors had to give to the societies was not commensurate with the number of pupils benefited by the organizations.

Since only 47 per cent of the pupils of the schools take part in the school societies, it is obvious that the schools should provide some activities for the remaining 53 per cent of the school. In thirty-five of the schools in question some such provision is made. This usually takes the form of adding interest to the class organizations of the school, which are always open to all pupils. Other

activities mentioned are: interclass athletic contests, civic clubs, school "mixers," the social hour, group and school parties, dramatics, oratorical and declamatory contests, the school band, orchestra, and chorus, play festivals, excursions to places of scenic or civic interest, student councils, and similar activities. All these are open to any pupil who may wish to participate.

In many schools one stumbling-block in handling social organizations is the high-school fraternity. Since high-school fraternities are not, as a rule, recognized by the school, they are not amenable to the rules of the school governing expense, places where parties may be held, hours, chaperonage, and so on. Because the fraternities, as regards their organization, are almost free to do as they choose, the members of the recognized organizations usually chafe under restriction, and are inclined to imitate the fraternities so far as possible. The result is that the societies and the fraternities become an endless source of friction and annoyance. Since this is the case, it might not be out of place in this study of high-school social organizations to discuss the high-school fraternity also, for it exists in many schools. Fifty-seven of the schools in question reported that fraternities did not exist among them, though in thirty-nine of them fraternities had existed some time previously.

In seventeen of the schools fraternities are said to exist. Two officials were not sure whether there are fraternities in their schools or not. In two of the schools where there are fraternities the attitude of the school toward them was reported to be one of toleration. In ten schools they are ignored. In only one case are they fostered. In two cases the school authorities are still fighting them. In two schools they are said still to exist in spite of the state law, which is reported to be ineffectual.

In fourteen of the thirty-nine schools where there had been fraternities they were dropped because of the ruling of the board of education forbidding them. It is interesting to note that, with but one exception, school authorities are unanimously against high-school fraternities. The following quotations will show the attitude of educators toward them: "They are an abomination"; "We are continually waging warfare on their establishment"; "We are dead against them"; "We are absolutely opposed to

them"; "You cannot ignore them and endure"; "We have none, praise Jehovah!"

In seven of the schools where fraternities do exist members are barred from participation in all school activities other than class work. In the one school that reports a favorable attitude toward them there are said to be eleven or twelve such organizations. This same school reported twelve to fifteen as the average membership in societies, and 18 per cent of the student body belonging. No provision is made for non-members of societies.

In four schools where fraternities had existed and had been forced out, other school activities were substituted: "We have substituted other activities for them—student council, athletic sports of all kinds—and the 'frat' is so outclassed that it is no longer a question with us"; "We got rid of the fraternities first by establishing legitimate activities under faculty supervision, later we were backed by state law"; "We substituted clubs under faculty supervision"; "We have seen to it that there were enough legitimate student activities to keep things lively." In addition to these quotations it might not be out of place, before leaving the question of high-school fraternities, to give briefly the arguments for¹ and against secret societies in high schools. The reasons generally given for their existence are: "They develop the social phase in student life"; "they tend to gratify the exclusive and secret tendency"; "they gratify the organizing instinct, and they are an imitation of college life." The arguments against them are: "They are undemocratic"; "the students get a false standard of life"; "the effect on school spirit is bad"; "they bring politics into the legitimate organizations of the school"; "the effect on scholarship is bad"; "the high-school student is too young for fraternity life."

The student organizations that are most democratic and most nearly give the students some training for citizenship are those that allow some degree of participation in school government. These organizations should not be confused with the more or less unsuccessful attempts at self-government that have been made from time to time in various schools. Perhaps they are an outgrowth of

¹ From Roscoe Conkling Hill, "Secret Societies in High Schools," *Educational Review*, February, 1912.

those attempts, but as a rule they are not so ambitious, and they have more definite aims. Usually these organizations have started by handling a few simple projects, and have branched out as they have gained in experience and confidence. Some student councils are very unambitious, being little more than an advisory body which meets with the principal or with members of the faculty to discuss problems of the student body. Such councils give the school authorities the pupils' point of view and in turn are valuable in bringing important projects before the school as a whole. Most of these student councils have a certain number of representatives chosen from the class organizations or from the session rooms. Sometimes there are teacher-members, but more commonly the principal alone meets with the council. Schools reporting some form of the advisory type of student councils are: Omaha, Nebraska, Central High School; Louisville, Kentucky, Boys' High School; Taylorville, Illinois, Township High School; Columbus, Ohio, Cresview Intermediate High School; Fort Wayne, Indiana, High School; Kansas City, Missouri, Manual Training High School; Erie, Pennsylvania, Central High School; Rockford, Illinois, High School; Gary, Indiana, Emerson High School.

In other high schools the student council is concerned largely with student activities, such as school parties, money-raising projects, school debates, athletics, assembly programs, student finances, student clubs, lyceum courses, care of school trophies, etc. Such organizations are reported in the following schools: Butte, Montana, High School; East St. Louis High School; Richmond, Indiana, High School; Los Angeles, California, Hollywood High School; Muskegon, Michigan, Hackley High and Manual Training School; Flushing, New York, High School.

There are a number of schools that have organizations which, in addition to the activities mentioned above, participate more or less actively in the discipline of the school. The student council has charge of all cases of tardiness, discipline in the halls, lunch-rooms, and on the school grounds, helps care for school property, and fosters high scholastic standing. They also assist visitors and welcome new pupils. The Sacramento, California, High School has a student association, modeled after the city charter, which

provides for the commission form of government. The school commissioners have charge of discipline in the halls and on the grounds, of school finances, entertainments, athletics, debates, the school paper, the annual, and school dramatics. There is a school police court of pupils and an appellate court of teachers. The West High School, Minneapolis, Minnesota, has a student executive board composed of eighteen pupils and two teachers, also a forum composed of two representatives from each of the fifty-three advisory groups of the school. These bodies supervise the order in the halls and in the lunchroom, the care of the toilet-rooms, the care of the grounds; they try to eliminate petty thieving and to minimize cribbing and cheating. The DeWitt Clinton High School of New York City has a general student organization as well as an executive council of six teachers and eight pupils. These organizations help to regulate the establishment and management of all school teams, clubs, associations, and societies connected with the school. There is also a sanitary squad of pupils, a printing squad, a traffic squad, a study-hall squad, and a hall squad. The more fortunately endowed pupils, those who have attained honors in school, every afternoon conduct classes for the purpose of aiding their less fortunate fellows in catching up with their studies.

The student body organization of the Manual Arts High School of Los Angeles, California, is composed of 2,200 students and the teachers of the school. The aim of the organization is "to do at all times all it can, in all the ways it can, all the good it can for Manual Arts." There is also a council of all the classroom presidents, seventy-five in number. This meets twice a week to debate and decide on important questions of interest to the students. There are also a girls' and a boys' self-government organization. These have charge of all cases of tardiness. Each branch has a court and jury. There is, in addition, a board of finance, composed of students and teachers, which handled during one year \$50,000. The co-operative form of student organization is reported to exist in the following schools: Highland Park High School, Cook County, Illinois; Union High School, Gresham, Oregon; Montclair, New Jersey, High School; Orange Union High School, Orange, California; East Side High School, Denver, Colorado; Dubuque,

Iowa, High School; English High School, Boston, Massachusetts; Colorado Springs, Colorado, High School; Washington Irving High School, New York City; DeWitt Clinton High School, New York City; West High School, Minneapolis, Minn.; Springfield, Illinois, High School; Decatur, Illinois, High School.

There is wide difference in opinion among school authorities in regard to the advisability of student participation in the management of the school. Twenty-three administrators seemed to have no definite opinion on the subject. Others seemed to confuse the project with student self-government, or were opposed to it altogether, as the following comments will show: "Students should study and recite, teachers should *teach* and supervise"; "Students should not have a direct voice in governing their fellow-students"; "First- and second-year students are incapable of self-government, and Juniors are little better. I think Seniors need to be backed up by a pretty definite set of restrictions"; "There should be no student participation in the government of the school. *A school must be a benevolent despotism*"; "There should be no student participation absolutely, except as school spirit and respect for proper authority may assist."

On the other hand, many school men are enthusiastic over the possibilities arising from student participation in the management of the school. The following quotations will give the view of some of them: "It is ideal in my opinion"; "They should participate just so far as they will go. If they succeed they have other things added unto them"; "They should participate to a considerable extent. To be trusted is to be saved. Children should get in the habit of taking responsibility"; "They should be allowed as much freedom as tends to develop respect for law and order, with a large spirit of co-operation with the faculty"; "Student participation is valuable toward bringing the pupil's mind to a realization of what education and its implements mean for good citizenship."

Of all student societies, these co-operative organizations seem to give the most promise of making a real contribution to the pupil's education. Since the ultimate aim of secondary education is to prepare the pupils for life in a democracy, the pupil should be given every opportunity to practice democracy in the civic life of the

school. Just as educators realize that a pupil can keep his health better by taking regular exercise than by reading books of hygiene, or can learn printing by doing the printing of the school better than by hearing lectures upon the subject, so, too, the pupil can gain more civic training by being given civic responsibilities in the microcosm of the school than by studying about civil government in textbooks. There is no reason why the pupil should not receive part of his civic training by "doing," just as he receives part of his vocational or his health training in this way.

The gravest defect in democracies has always been their inefficiency, the waste in time and resources that attends the perfecting of anything like an effective organization. This defect, however, is not necessarily an inherent one. As business and labor interests have been able to organize successfully, so should the civic interests of the community, and the school inevitably must be responsible for training future citizens to work efficiently through organization. That the schools can give the pupils this training is being demonstrated by the work of student co-operative organizations in several places. The tremendous possibilities of these organizations have as yet been little more than tapped. When educators fully realize the importance of giving the pupils every possible opportunity of learning citizenship by practicing it in the social situations of the school, and of helping them to learn how to work effectively through organizing the whole student body, these student co-operative organizations will become one of the most important educational forces of the modern high school. Nor need it be feared, as some would have it, that the school will build up a machine that will eventually crush the individual. The machine is dangerous only when developed for the sake of the machine. There can be no danger if efficient machinery is perfected in order to develop the individual so that he may, to the best of his ability, work with his fellow-men for the benefit of society as a whole.